

*President's Award winner
is youth advocate*

Leading by Example

COMPASSIONATE, CARING, committed, and creative. These are the words that best describe Jan Felthous. She leads by example, always puts others first, and never stops looking for ways to improve the lives of those around her through her volunteer efforts. She cares about the welfare of all children and is a mentor to the youth in her school and community. Her life is spent assisting others and helping them become the best they can be. These qualities have earned Jan the National Mutual Benefit President's Award for being named 2004 Fraternalist of the Year—an

honor truly deserved by this dedicated woman.

Jan teaches in an inner city high school setting. As she teaches family and consumer education at the school, she not only shares her cooking and sewing skills, but also teaches young people about important life skills such as financial planning, handling relationships, and how to live independently when they are adults. Some students are learning these skills for the first time in their lives.

Something as simple as donating pencils to her class brings Jan joy. "Many of the students don't even have a pencil to



Jan Felthous (left), a champion for successful youth, presents a scholarship to Mary Doleshal on behalf of the Oconomowoc branch.

write with in class," says Jan. "You need to equip them with all of the tools they need to be successful."

As a caring mentor, Jan is constantly teaching her students by example how to be a compassionate person. "My two biggest concerns for these students are truancy and security," states Jan. So she provides an environment that fosters acceptance, compassion, and guidance to help them reach their potential as adults. "I believe that you accept who they are rather than try to change them. They [the students] put up a wall if you try to make them into something they are not. They need guidance, not dictatorship," explains Jan as she describes her philosophy on how to treat young people.

Jan has a natural ability to connect young people and adults together to carry out projects that make an impact on their community and other people's lives. Under her leadership as president of National Mutual Benefit's Oconomowoc volunteer chapter, a position she



Under the direction of Jan Felthous, Oconomowoc Branch 717 youth and adults spend a volunteer day at the Hunger Task Force warehouse in Milwaukee sorting food for distribution to area food pantries.



held from 1997 to 2004, Branch 717 has continually provided volunteer opportunities for young people.

A young woman in Branch 717 was encouraged by Jan to develop a summer read-aloud program at the public library. She and friends prepared materials for high school students to sign up and partner with elementary students who needed extra help with reading. Teens volunteer each summer to mentor the younger children by having the children read out loud to them. The younger students improve their literacy skills, while the college-bound high school students develop relationships with their young protégés. In a project Jan helped organize with the Hunger Task Force, youth had the opportunity to serve their community by sorting items for food pantries and soup kitchens.

Through the Oconomowoc branch, NMB members support a Boy Scout each year to carry out an extensive project to earn the prestigious Eagle Scout designation. "I remember what my son, Tony, had to go through a few years ago when he was accomplishing this same

feat," Jan recalls. "He worked on a huge project himself, so I appreciate helping other scouts accomplish their goal. Our branch helps sponsor the scout, who plans and carries out the entire project. All we do is supply the volunteer manpower to complete it."

According to Jan, the family unit is the most important aspect of a strong community. Her favorite saying was passed down to her from fellow NMB member Dorothy Waleciewicz years ago. "Fraternalism is Familyism . . . doing this as a family, participating together . . . kids learn more by your actions than from what you tell them." Jan adds, "Values are caught, not taught."

As this article is being written, Jan's oldest son, Andy, is flying back to the United States after serving a year in Iraq. It is a joyful day for the whole family as they look forward to being together once again for a welcome home celebration.

On a statewide level, Jan recently volunteered to serve as vice president of the Wisconsin Association of Family and Consumer Services. As such, she was instrumental in planning and promoting a public policy forum in southern Wisconsin. The purpose of the forum was to

gather public opinion pertaining to current health and medical services and to provide a voice for people in Wisconsin to state their concerns and preferences regarding these timely issues.

Out of the hundreds of activities and events that Jan, her husband Jim, their sons, and other NMB members in the Oconomowoc area have organized, Jan has no one favorite project. She has worked with seniors, families, and teenagers. They've improved a school nature center, updated the community library, and implemented reading programs partnering young children and teens. Jan says, "Whatever I'm doing at the time is my favorite project."

Strong leadership skills, a knack for guiding others to accomplish good things, and always giving others the credit is what you get with Jan Felthous. "This is a wonderful team [Branch 717] to volunteer with," Jan reiterates. "The truth is you cannot do it alone. I work with a group of 'can do' people."

Jan Felthous lives in the moment and cherishes each and every opportunity she has to be involved with teaching others how to share their talents, as she continually does herself. ♦

Honor Our Country . . . and Our Flag

Whether you are a student, parent, grandparent, or a veteran of the armed forces, you know that June and July are special months for United States citizens to honor the U.S. flag and our country.

Look for a local Flag Day ceremony taking place in your community on June 14, National Flag Day. A local NMB branch, another fraternal benefit society, or a local veteran's group may be organizing an event that you could get involved in. Celebrate our freedom on Independence Day, July 4, by getting together with family and friends, attending fireworks displays, and by waving your flag in a parade.

Show your "colors" all year long by flying the U.S. flag proudly on your home. Fill out the order form on the postcard inside this magazine to get your U.S. flag kit or to replace a worn flag. Honor America and the freedoms we enjoy!

